



July 7, 2011

Dangers at the Beach



One of the greatest benefits of living in Florida, especially on the coast, is the beautiful beaches. Many of us easily could spend hours, if not days, just hanging out in the sand and sun. However, have you considered the effects and dangers of the beach? The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) came up with these seven beach dangers.

Rip currents can be killers. They account for more than 80 percent of rescues performed by beach lifeguards. Rip currents are powerful, channeled currents of water flowing away from shore that quickly pull swimmers out to sea. They typically extend from the shoreline, through the surf zone, and past the line of breaking waves. The best way to stay safe is to recognize the danger of rip currents and remember to swim at beaches with lifeguards.

A **shorebreak** is an ocean condition that occurs when waves break directly on the shore. Shorebreaks are unpredictable and dangerous. They have caused serious neck and spinal injuries to experienced and inexperienced bodysurfers and swimmers. Both low and high surf can equally be dangerous and cause serious injury or death. Be sure to ask a lifeguard about the wave conditions at the beach.

Lightning - When thunder roars, go indoors! The safest place during lightning activity is a large, enclosed building, not a picnic shelter or shed. The second safest place is an enclosed vehicle, car, truck, van, etc., but NOT a convertible, bike or other topless or soft-top vehicle. Wait 30 minutes until after the last thunder crack before going back to the beach.

Shark attacks, though rare, most likely to occur near the shore; typically inshore of a sandbar or between sandbars, where sharks can become trapped by low tide, and near steep drop offs where shark's prey gather. The relative risk of a shark attack is small, but the risks always should be minimized whenever possible. To reduce your risk:

- Don't swim too far from shore
- Stay in groups -- sharks are more likely to attack a solitary individual
- Avoid being in the water during darkness or twilight when sharks are most active
- Don't go in the water if you're bleeding from a wound -- sharks have a very acute sense of smell
- Leave shiny jewelry at home -- the reflected light resembles fish scales
- Avoid brightly-colored swimwear -- sharks can contrast particularly well

Keep an eye out for **Jellyfish**. All jellies sting, but not all jellies have poison that hurts humans. Of the 2,000 species of jellyfish, about 70 seriously harm or occasionally kill people. Take note of the warning signs posted on the beach. Be careful around jellies that wash up on the sand. Some still sting if their tentacles are wet. Tentacles torn off a jelly can sting, too. If you are stung, wash the wound with vinegar or rubbing alcohol. Also, sprinkle meat tenderizer or put a baking soda and water paste on the sting. Don't rinse. Rinsing with water could release more poison. Lifeguards usually offer first aid for stings. See a doctor if you have an allergic reaction.

Sunburn - Too much sun can spoil a vacation. It can take up to 24 hours before the full extent of damage is visible. The two most common types of burns are first- and second-degree burns. First-degree sunburns cause redness and will heal, possibly with some peeling, within a few days. These can be painful and are best treated with cool baths, bland moisturizers or over-the-counter hydrocortisone creams. Second-degree sunburns blister and can be considered a medical emergency if a large area is affected. Seek medical help immediately when a severe burn is accompanied by a headache, chills or fever. Be sure to protect your skin from the sun while it heals. **DO NOT APPLY BUTTER OR OIL TO ANY BURN!**

If you have questions, comments, or a topic you would like to see addressed:

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Safety Tip of the Week

Here's your
sign

